

STATEMENT
TO THE UN
DECOLONISATION COMMITTEE

**SESSION ON
EAST TIMOR**

NEW YORK, 12 AUGUST, 1988

BISHOP PATELISIO P. FINAU, S.M. D.D.

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Bishop Finau.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, thank you for this opportunity to speak on the East Timor question which for many years has been a deep concern of the Pacific Conference of Churches whom I am representing today.

My name is Patelisio Finau. I am the Catholic Bishop of Tonga. May I observe at the outset that though my country is significantly smaller than East Timor in terms of land area and population size, Tonga is an independent nation and one of the few island peoples in the South Pacific region never to have been colonised. As a Tongan, therefore, I have little sympathy for those who would argue that micro-states, such as East Timor, are inherently unviable and have no future except as part of a larger entity.

The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) comprises the major Christian Churches in the Islands of the Pacific. The peoples I represent live in an area from Marquesas and French Polynesia in the east to New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea in the west; Cook Islands and Tonga in the south to the Islands of Micronesia in the north, reaching the Mariana Islands. PCC is served by a secretariat located in Fiji. In 1985, the Conference endorsed an international declaration on East Timor which was signed by 427 Parliamentarians and, amongst others, by 109 Church organisations from Asia and the Pacific. The Declaration called for direct negotiations with the people of East Timor including those who resist Indonesian occupation, an end to hostilities, independent access to the territory, and an act of self-determination 'free from interference and verified by international observers acceptable to the East Timorese people'. I too endorsed this declaration along with several of my Episcopal colleagues in the South Pacific.

At the last General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches, held in Western Samoa in September 1986 and attended by 200 participants, a strongly worded resolution on East Timor was adopted. The three main clauses of this resolution read as follows:-

'The Conference affirms the rights of the East Timorese to full recognition of their sovereignty as an independent nation and condemns the Indonesian Government for illegal occupation of East Timor.'

'It strongly condemns the Australian Labour Party and Australian Government for recently changing their policy of supporting the self-determination of the East Timorese.'

'The Conference calls on all Pacific people and their governments to support the East Timorese in their struggle for self-determination and independence and in particular to ensure that East Timor remains on the United Nations agenda as a priority.'

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, concern over East Timor has not been limited to Churches in the vicinity of East Timor. Church leaders and organisations in many parts of the world such as Portugal, the United States, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Japan, and Hong Kong - to name some, have also repeatedly spoken out moved both by compassion for the suffering in East Timor and, in many cases, by profound dismay at the failure of the international system to redress the injustices which lie at the root of the conflict.

East Timor also remains an issue for the Holy See. In December last year Pope John Paul II reaffirmed his continued concern in a statement delivered in the presence of Indonesia's new ambassador to the Vatican, Roni Hendrawan Kurniadi. The Pope told the ambassador, and by extension the Indonesian Government, that **"The Church's universal mission of service leads her to hope that particular consideration will be given to the protection of the ethnic, religious, and cultural character of the people of East Timor"**. It is significant that this appeal repeated almost exactly remarks he made on a similar occasion two years earlier in July 1984.

Though the Holy Father did not explicitly identify the threat to the 'ethnic, religious and cultural character of the people of East Timor' that prompted his admonition, there is no doubt in my mind that such a threat exists in East Timor and has already eroded Timorese traditions and identity. It is embodied in the heavy weight of the Indonesian military, administrative and commercial presence and brought to bear heavily on this small society through the resettlement of Indonesian transmigrants, an extensive education system targeting the young and in other ways such as the propagation of Indonesian values and culture through the Indonesian controlled media.

In view of the nature and rationale of Indonesia's takeover of East Timor, it is difficult to believe that Indonesia's military places much positive value on 'things Timorese' for their own sake. One must anticipate, sadly, that the absorption or Indonesianisation of East Timor is ultimately intended to be complete - militarily, politically, economically and culturally.

Against this background, the Pope's appeals deserve our closest attention. His appeals have clearly been made on behalf of the local Church of East Timor whose people are feeling integrationist pressures intensely. One may question whether cultural self-determination can be achieved where political self-determination and basic rights are denied. However, in a tight situation where real options are few and far between, the Timorese Church believes it has a particular vocation at this point of time to resist the real prospect of cultural annihilation and to enlist in this struggle the support of the Pope and, hopefully, the international community generally. Nothing less than the soul of East Timor is at stake.

This struggle for cultural survival is a mission the Pacific Conference of Churches wishes to support whole-heartedly. I would like to urge the United Nations to devote more attention to this neglected but crucial aspect of the broader issue.

Indonesian officials reacted defensively to the Pope's admonition and I would like now to make some observations about their reactions as they were reported in the Djakarta press.

In the first place, Indonesian spokesmen tried to discredit the Pope by claiming that he was poorly informed on the reality in East Timor and that he had listened to the wrong people. In response it should be pointed out that the Pope's informants are in fact the people of East Timor themselves, most of whom belong to the Catholic Church which is established in every district of East Timor and accountable directly to the Vatican. Pope John Paul II is in fact one of the best informed world leaders on this issue.

For his part, Indonesia's then Foreign Minister, Dr. Mochtar, complained that the Pope 'would commend Indonesia if he knew what we did for the Catholic Church in East Timor' adding (to quote his words) that 'those who were heathen and animist before have become Catholics'.

It is true that the Catholic population of East Timor has doubled since Indonesia's takeover. However this remarkable phenomenon had been due, not to any benign policy on the part of Indonesia's military, as Dr. Mochtar has sought to suggest, but to the deeply unsettling and traumatic circumstances surrounding Indonesia's violent occupation. Beset by war, hunger, and an aggressive foreign presence, the people turned to the Church en masse for assistance, protection and as a vehicle to represent their concerns and aspirations. The weak and oppressed found a voice in the Church. With the assistance of the international Church, including in particular the Indonesian Catholic Church, the local Church has been able to respond to these enormous challenges, justly earning widespread admiration for its work.

The Church's role in East Timor is an important one. However it suffers from the enforced isolation which afflicts East Timor as a whole due to Indonesian control. This enforced isolation obstructs the free flow of personnel, ideas, resources and skills. The Church in East Timor would be greatly assisted in its service of the people if a measure of 'glasnost' were permitted allowing free interaction with the international Church community. Unlike the situation in the South Pacific where such relationships are taken for granted and encouraged, no such contact is possible for the Church of Timor.

A third Indonesian reaction to the Papal statement of last December was that the Pope was not well informed about the development that has taken place in East Timor under Indonesia, the implication being that his remarks should have been qualified by this acknowledgment.

While not wishing to deny that many changes are to be seen in East Timor in the form of new buildings, roads and other facilities, these projects do not of themselves constitute 'development' for the Pope. According to Church teaching, real development is as much about human rights as it is about bricks and mortar or even the satisfaction of basic needs. Pope John Paul's recent encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* has this to say about poverty:-

'In today's world there are many forms of poverty the denial or the limitation of human rights - as for example the right to religious freedom, the right to share in the building of society, the freedom to organise and to form unions or to take initiatives in economic matters - do these not impoverish the human person as much as, if not more than, the deprivation of material goods? And is development which does not take into account the full affirmation of these rights really development on the human level?'

Evaluated in these terms the development of East Timor under Indonesia leaves much to be desired as basic freedoms are not respected. What evidence is there in contemporary East Timor of, for example, the right to organise, to form unions, to share in the building of the society the Timorese envisaged for themselves in 1975?

The people of East Timor do not prefer having more things to being less human. Their cry is for freedom and they will not sell their soul as a people for any material gain.

The inadequacy of Indonesia's official development program is even more apparent when judged against the two standards which the United Nations regards as basic to genuine development. These two essentials are the right to self-determination and the right to participate. Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the right to development states: **"The human right to development also implies the full realisation of peoples to self-determination which includes the exercise of their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their national wealth and resources."**

Would anyone argue that the Timorese people are exercising their right to full sovereignty over all their national wealth and resources?

The second essential emphasised by the UN as integral to development is the right to popular participation. Article 2 of the UN Declaration on the right to development just quoted states: **"The human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development."** The reality in East Timor is, I fear, that the economy is monopolised by and geared to an Indonesian elite, not the Timorese people, and that the state machinery prevents the Timorese from meaningful participation.

I submit that it is on the basis of these agreed fundamentals that the reality in East Timor must be assessed and addressed.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, in this necessarily brief statement I have sought to focus on the people of East Timor and their needs and rights. In the realpolitik world of international diplomacy and the often unscrupulous pursuit of self-interest by nation states, there is always the danger that the people will be sacrificed and ignored.

Like the Church in East Timor our first concern must be to listen to the people, to identify their concerns and aspirations and to respond courageously and creatively in solidarity with them. Their priority concerns can be summed up as the quest for cultural, economic and political self-determination, that is, the freedom to be Timorese in their own way in their own land. These priorities must be our priorities.

As my brother Bishops of the Indonesian Catholic Church stated in their letter to the East Timor Church, of November 17, 1983 **"peace is an enterprise of justice not merely the absence of war or something brought about by dictatorship"**. In partnership with them I too pray that the Church in East Timor will remain 'in the vanguard' in this search 'holding strong' until justice is attained. Without the active support of the international community, however, this search is doomed to frustration and possible failure.

In conclusion, therefore, I strongly urge this United Nations Committee and the UN Secretary-General in particular to make the advancement of the Timorese people's interests and inalienable rights your priority objective and over-riding concern in all future activities on the question.

Thank you.